

Tridentine Community News

July 5, 2026 – Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Developments in Church Bell Systems

Before Vatican II, it was common for Catholic churches to be built with one or more bells in their towers. As often as every quarter hour, the bells would toll to alert those in proximity of the time of day. This writer recalls that back in the 1970s, the Frauenkirche in Munich, which serves as the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising, rang its bells every 15 minutes, even throughout the night. (As a child staying in a nearby hotel, that certainly made it difficult to sleep.)

After Vatican II, church bells were less frequently included as standard equipment in the construction of new churches. Many churches were built without bells. The leading vendor of church bell systems in North America, the Verdin Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, attempted to remain on dioceses' radar by developing two less expensive alternative systems:

First was a replacement of the conventional swinging bell mechanism with a system in which the bell remained stationary, while an electric hammer struck the bell. Older swinging bell systems often included this arrangement to allow for a "toller", a more somber ringing sound appropriate for funerals. The newer concept, without the swinging mechanism, tried to replicate the fuller sound of a traditional swinging arrangement by having the hammer strike the bell more frequently and irregularly. In practice, the sound is quieter and lacks the subtle acoustic dynamics of a swinging bell.

Even less expensive was a "Digital Carillon", an electronic "bell" system, emphasis on the quotes. Marketed under names such as "The Singing Tower", this is essentially a timer-based player of recordings of bells. There are no actual bells in such a system, just speakers outside the church. These systems often play recordings of carillons playing hymns suitable for the liturgical season. Verdin claims they have a library of 7,800 "songs" available to be played. Local churches that have such an electronic system include St. Aloysius in Detroit, St. Alphonsus in Windsor, and the Orchard Lake Shrine Chapel. Some churches have both real bells and an electronic system, including Detroit's Old St. Mary's and St. Josaphat, though St. Josaphat's electronic system is an early version that has not worked for decades.



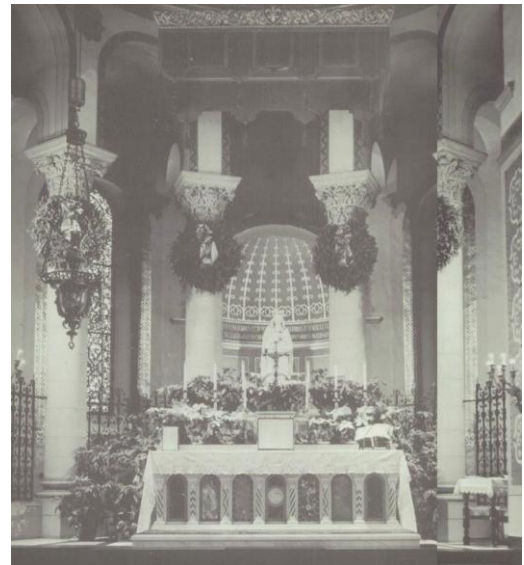
apparently continues to be willing to service them.

To see some old-school mechanical bell controller technology, visit St. Josaphat Church, where a 1940s-era timer is mounted on the right wall of the sanctuary; or come to the sacristy of Holy Name of Mary Church in Windsor, where a similar timer is mounted on the wall [pictured]. Amazingly, these timers still work despite their age, and the Verdin Company

Modern bell controllers, whether for real bells or an electronic system, have sophisticated computerized timers and wireless remote controls that allow the bells to be rung on demand, for example by an altar server at the Consecration. Old St. Mary's, which has a full traditional swinging bell system, has such a remote, as does Assumption Church in Windsor, whose bell was fixed in place and outfitted with a hammer system a few decades ago. Although there is a remote control for the electronic "bells" at Orchard Lake, we do not ring them for the Latin Mass there; that would seem too...fake...for the Traditional Mass.

Historic Photos of St. Mary of Redford

Posted on April 6 on the "I Went to Catholic School in Metro Detroit" Facebook group, these photos from the 1961-62 St. Mary of Redford High School Yearbook depict the sanctuary of the church before its renovation. The baldacchino above the High Altar endured until the 1980s.



Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 07/07 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary* (Ss. Cyril & Methodius, Bishops & Confessors)

Fri. 07/10 12:00 Noon: High Mass at *St. Thomas the Apostle, Ann Arbor* (Seven Holy Brothers, Martyrs, and Ss. Rufina & Secunda, Virgins & Martyrs) – Mass accompanied by the student singers of the Canticle Chant Camp

Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail info@windsorlatinmass.org. Previous columns are available at www.windsorlatinmass.org.